

## Volume 6 Section 322

# Interlude VI - 2nd Battalion

### June - September 1918

*Following the German Assault of the 21st March the 2nd Battalion had been reduced to being part of a composite battalion, the 2nd/8th. By early June it was time to rebuild the Battalion (continued from section 312)*

On the 31st May the 8th Division was withdrawn from the line to Nanteuil. The fighting strength of the 2nd Royal Berks on this day, after the losses since the 27th, was only seven officers and one hundred and twenty other ranks. They were ordered to report to the Headquarters of the 74th Infantry Brigade at Nappe, and then to form, with other remnants of the 8th Division, one battalion to be called the 1/8th Composite Battalion, which moved into reserve in the Bois de Courton.

#### 2nd - 11th June 1918

On the 2nd it moved into close support at the Neuville-Chaumuz Road, and on the same day a 2/8th Composite battalion was formed from troops at battalion transport lines, such as drummers and newly arrived reinforcements. To this battalion the 2nd Royal Berkshire contributed two officers and fifty other ranks.

The 1/8th Composite Battalion remained in close support, the 2/8th in reserve till the 8th June, when both were called up to hold the line in the Bois de Eclisse till the 11th.

### Rebuilding

#### 12th June to 4th July 1918

On the 12th the Composite Battalion was withdrawn from the front and the 2nd Royal Berkshire was bussed to a point about 1 1/2 miles north of Hawtwillers. Here the composite battalion took place and was broken up, its components going back to their original battalions and the 8th Division were transferred back to the British Army after their spell in the French Army.

GHQ maintained a league table of casualties by Division of losses since 21st March. 50th Division topped the table with 8th Division only 300 behind, the third place Division was over a 1000 behind 8th Division. No less than seven Divisions were so under strength at the beginning of June that they were regarded as unfit for combat but any reinforcements that were available were sent to those on the active list. However despite their heavy losses the 8th Division were still regarded as active and so the reinforcements began arriving.

The 2nd Battalion entrained at Fere Champenoise in the afternoon, at 17:13 passed by Paris, detrained next day at Longpre-les-Corps-Saints. They then marched to Merlessart, far from the front towards Dieppe. There they re-kitted They marched to Aigneville on the 22nd June, where they were billeted and then on to Bourseville where they reorganised.

With all the new arrivals it was essential that training was thorough and an intensive programme was drawn up by 8th Division. The usual routine was combined training in the mornings with lectures and specialist training in the afternoons. The ranges were in constant use and special consideration was given to training in conjunction with the artillery which was to prove most useful for the campaigns ahead.

### Meneslies

#### 4th to 14th July 1918

On the 4th July 25th and 24th Brigades swapped training facilities and the Royal Berks marched to Meneslies into billets described as poor.

During the earlier days of July there were regimental and brigade sports, and a divisional horse show. They were reinforced by men from a number of different regiments who settled in with the veterans of the 2nd remarkably well to forge a new and cohesive unit.

On the 9th July the division was put into GHQ reserve and ordered to be ready to move at 24 hours notice.

On the 14th July, the 8th Division was transferred from the XXIIInd to the IVth Corps. However for a few days they were put under XIX Corps in Rawlinson's 4th Army

### Tilloy Floriville

#### 15th to 19th July 1918

On the 15th another route march took them to Tilloy Floriville where they took over billets from the 2nd West Yorkshires. The battalion was still training till the 19th when they were back on duty again.

On the 18th a telephone call to Divisional HQ ordered the transfer to 1st Army. In retrospect this day marked the turning point in the war as all the German Spring Offensives had been contained and on this day Foch launched his first counter attack making it Ludendorff's 'black day'

## **Bois D'Ohlain**

**19th to 22nd July 1918**

8th Division transferred to the First Army on the 19th although less its artillery. They were faced with a 200 miles rail journey via Paris which took over 24 hours. The Royal Berks less B Coy began boarding no 7 train at 19:59 which departed at 20:50. B Coy followed on train 10 at 11:59. They arrived at Pernes and marched to camp at Bois d'Ohlain near Lens. They remained encamped in a wood while 8th Division prepared to take over from 52nd Division.

The train carrying the 2nd East Lancs was machine gunned by a lone German aircraft as it arrived at Pernes.

On arrival 6th Division came properly under the control of VIII Corps under Lt General Sir Aylmer Hunter Weston.

## **Durham and Lancaster Camp**

**22nd to 30th July 1918**

On the 22nd the 8th Division replaced the 52nd in the right sector of the VIII Corps front, the 25th Brigade being at Mont St. Eloi, N.W. of Arras. The 2nd Royal Berkshire remained here without any fighting till the 5th August as 8th Division were in Corps Reserve.

Maiwand Day on the 27th July was declared a general holiday with sports morning and afternoon and 8th Division's band to entertain.

## **Fraser Camp**

**30th July to 5th August 1918**

They moved to Fraser Camp on the 30th July for further training.

## **Back in the Line**

**5th to 12th August 1918**

25th Brigade relieved 23rd Brigade on the 5th August. The Royal Berks moved by lorries to Neuville St. Vaast. Then it crossed the Vimy Ridge to relieve the 2nd West Yorkshire in the Abbeville Sector. The passage of the ridge had to be made two men at a time, with thirty-five yards' interval between each pair. The Royal Berks were in the centre with the 2nd East Lancs on the right and the 1st Worcesters on the left. The old system of one battalion in support had gone since the reorganisation of Brigades in February and this time all four companies were in the front line.

Writing in the China Dragon Pte Edward G W Gash [54916] of the Scout section of HQ Company described the duties and some of the activities of the Scouts. He began in early August:-

To those of the Battalion not on Headquarters, this name conjures up visions of deep and comfortable dugouts, where people are making tea or sleeping all day.

Of course the scouts, when in the line, usually sleep in a dugout, but far from having a "scrounage" were a very useful and hard-working section. The present section are all men who joined the Battalion in June, when the 8th Division was remade and reorganised, and, to their credit be it said, hardly any have had courses, but have learned their duties through hard experiences.

On August 5th, 1918 after the rest by the seaside, the Battalion took over the Vimy Sector, where the scouts performed much good work both by observing and by patrolling. Constant observation was maintained from the Observation Post in New Brunswick trench which held a commanding view of the whole country from the front line to Acheville and Mericourt, and during the latter period of our stay at Vimy an enemy's battery was located. As the result of reports sent to the artillery, this battery was destroyed.

Daylight patrols were carried out in Quebec and Toper Trenches and along the Mericourt and Quarry Roads up to the outskirts of Mericourt village. On August 24th L.-Cpl. Ansell, M.M., and Pte. Walters, D.C.M., M.M., were captured whilst in Hericourt on patrol; on two previous days they had also been in the village. Pte. Walters, however, escaped after only eighteen days in captivity.

About the same time reports were received stating that enemy's working parties had been heard in Totnes Trench. A patrol of Lieut. Strange, L.Cpl. Moseley and two men went, out to investigate, and discovered that these reports were incorrect and that the "working" had consisted of the wings of an old German aeroplane swaying in the breeze and striking some barbed wire. On the return a strand of wire struck one of the men's helmets. A German Machine Gun crew heard the sound and, to the accompaniment of a barrage of machine gun bullets and obscene language, our men withdrew.

**12th to 21st August 1918**

On the 12th the Royal Berks were relieved by the 2nd Rifle Brigade and moved back into support. D Coy was attached to the 185th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers and the other three companies were engaged on digging a new trench.

On the 21st they moved back to holding the line at Acheville.

## **Holding the Line**

**22nd to 27th August 1918**

They moved back into the line on the 22nd but kept only three companies there. D Coy rejoined on the 25th to hold the outpost and A Coy moved back to the main (black) line. They were relieved by the 6th KSLI of 30th Brigade on the 27th.

**27th August 1918**

However they merely moved from one front line to another as on the 27th August the battalion moved into the Bailleul sector, relieving the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Here it had in front line "B" Company on the right, and "D" on the left, with "C" in support, and "A" in reserve.

Pte Gash

On August 27th the Battalion was withdrawn from Vimy and paid a visit to that most delectable spot, Oppy Wood, relieving the 1/5th Argyle and Sutherlands.

Whilst on this front several guns, dumps and light railways were " spotted " from the " Hawk " Observation Post and overland tracks were found for ration parties by patrols.

#### **28th August 1918**

On the 28th it was known that the enemy was retreating on this front and orders issued for pursuit next day. The two leading companies were B and D

#### **29th August 1918**

During the advance on the 29th the following casualties occurred:

*Officers. Killed:* Lieut. A. J. Carlisle.

*Wounded:* Lieut. A. G. C. Rice,  
2nd-Lieuts. L. Smith, J. W. Shepherd. *Other Ranks:*  
*Killed or Died of Wounds 7. Wounded 26; Missing 8.*

The advance on this date was not an extensive one. It commenced at 14:30 and reached Canada trench, with outposts in trenches farther on, but no full account of it is to be found in the diary of the battalion.

### **Ecurie Wood Camp**

**1st to 9th September 1918**

Being relieved on the 1st September, the battalion moved out by lorry and went into Ecurie Wood Camp till the 9th, when it relieved the 2nd East Lancashire in the right sub-sector of the brigade sector.

On the 4th there was a Divisional Ceremony at Mont St Eloi and the Royal Berks were complimented on their turn out by the Corps Commander.

Pte Gash

The Battalion was relieved from Oppy on September 1st, and after a week's rest at Ecurie Camp the Battalion again went up the line and took over from the 2nd East Lancs on the Gavrelle Front.

The observers occupied the " Ajax " O.P. in Missouri Trench, and a patrolling party went out to find an overland track up to Willie Support Trench, along which track one of the Scouts guided the pack ponies each night. From " Ajax " the observers spotted practically every gun position on the Front; they also found Enemy Headquarters at various places in the Fresnes-Rouvroy Line, in Mauville Farm and in Quiery La Motte. At the latter place they also found several dumps.

The companies were inspected by the CO on the 7th and in the evening there was a band concert at the YMCA. The next day (Sunday) the Brigade Commander presented medals to 8th Platoon, B Coy after church parade as they had won the Brigade ARA Competition.

*Continued with section 332*

### **Sources**

Petre p108-9

War Diaries, 2nd Bn, 25th Bde, 8Div

China Dragon

History of 8th Division